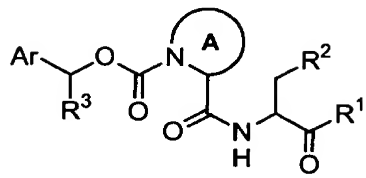
What is claimed is:

1. A compound of formula **I**:



I

wherein:

Ring A is an optionally substituted piperidine, tetrahydroquinoline or tetrahydroisoquinoline ring;

R^1 is hydrogen, CHN_2, R, or $-CH_2Y$;

R is an optionally substituted group selected from an aliphatic group, an aryl group, an aralkyl group, a heterocyclic group, or an heterocyclylalkyl group;

Y is an electronegative leaving group;

R^2 is CO_2H, CH_2CO_2H, or esters, amides or isosteres thereof;

Ar is an optionally substituted aryl group; and

R^3 is hydrogen, an optionally substituted C_{1-6} alkyl, F_2, CN, aryl or R^3 is attached to Ar to form an unsaturated or partially saturated five or six membered fused ring having 0-2 heteroatoms.

2. The compound of claim 1 having one or more of the following features:

(a) R^1 is CH_2F;

(b) R^2 is CO_2H or esters, amides or isosteres thereof;

(c) R^3 is hydrogen or an optionally substituted C_{1-6} alkyl; and

(d) Ar is an optionally substituted aryl.

3. The compound of claim 2 having the following features: (a) R^1 is CH_2F; (b) R^2 is CO_2H or esters, amides or isosteres thereof; (c) R^3 is hydrogen or an optionally substituted C_{1-6} alkyl; and (d) Ar is an optionally substituted aryl.

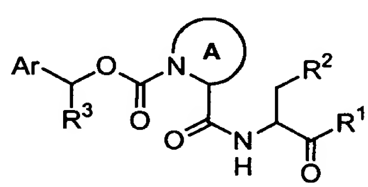
4. The compound of claim 3 where Ring A is a piperidine ring.

5. The compound of claim 3 where Ring A is a tetrahydroquinoline ring.

6. The compound of claim 3 where Ring A is a tetrahydroisoquinoline ring.

7. The compound of claim 1, wherein the compound is selected from the compounds listed in Table 1.

8. A method for treating a condition or disease state in mammals that is alleviated by treatment with a caspase inhibitor, comprising administering to a mammal in need of such a treatment a therapeutically effective amount of a compound of formula **I**:



I

wherein:

Ring A is an optionally substituted piperidine, tetrahydroquinoline or tetrahydroisoquinoline ring;

R^1 is hydrogen, CHN_2, R, or $-CH_2Y$;

R is an optionally substituted group selected from an aliphatic group, an aryl group, an aralkyl group, a heterocyclic group, or an heterocyclylalkyl group;

Y is an electronegative leaving group;

R^2 is CO_2H, CH_2CO_2H, or esters, amides or isosteres thereof;

Ar is an optionally substituted aryl group; and

R^3 is hydrogen, an optionally substituted C_{1-6} alkyl, F_2, CN, aryl, or R^3 is attached to Ar to form an unsaturated or partially saturated five or six membered fused ring having 0-2 heteroatoms.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the compound has one or more of the following features: (a) R^1 is CH_2F; (b) R^2 is CO_2H or esters, amides or isosteres thereof; (c) R^3 is hydrogen or an optionally substituted C_{1-6} alkyl; and (d) Ar is an optionally substituted aryl.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein the compound has the following features: (a) R^1 is CH_2F; (b) R^2 is CO_2H or esters, amides or isosteres thereof; (c) R^3 is hydrogen, CF_3 or C_2F_5; and (d) Ar is an optionally substituted aryl.

11. The method of claim 8 wherein the compound is selected from the compounds listed in Table 1.

12. The method of claim 8 wherein the disease is selected from an IL-1 mediated disease, an apoptosis mediated disease, an inflammatory disease, an autoimmune disease, a destructive bone disorder, a proliferative disorder, an infectious disease, a degenerative disease, a disease associated with cell death, an excess dietary

alcohol intake disease, a viral mediated disease, uveitis, inflammatory peritonitis, osteoarthritis, pancreatitis, asthma, adult respiratory distress syndrome, glomerulonephritis, rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, scleroderma, chronic thyroiditis, Grave's disease, autoimmune gastritis, diabetes, autoimmune hemolytic anemia, autoimmune neutropenia, thrombocytopenia, chronic active hepatitis, myasthenia gravis, inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease, psoriasis, atopic dermatitis, scarring, graft vs host disease, organ transplant rejection, osteoporosis, leukemias and related disorders, myelodysplastic syndrome, multiple myeloma-related bone disorder, acute myelogenous leukemia, chronic myelogenous leukemia, metastatic melanoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, multiple myeloma, haemorrhagic shock, sepsis, septic shock, burns, Shigellosis, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease, Kennedy's disease, prion disease, cerebral ischemia,epilepsy, myocardial ischemia, acute and chronic heart disease, myocardial infarction, congestive heart failure, atherosclerosis, coronary artery bypass graft, spinal muscular atrophy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, multiple sclerosis, HIV-related encephalitis, aging, alopecia, neurological damage due to stroke, ulcerative colitis, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, hepatitis-B, hepatitis-C, hepatitis-G, yellow fever, dengue fever, or Japanese encephalitis, various forms of liver disease including alcoholic hepatitis, renal disease, polyaptic kidney disease, H. pylori-associated gastric and duodenal ulcer disease, HIV infection, tuberculosis, and meningitis.

13. The method of claim 8 wherein the compound is used to treat complications associated with coronary artery bypass grafts.

14. The method of claim 8 wherein the compound is used for the preservation of cells, said method comprising the step of bathing the cells in a solution of the compound or a pharmaceutically acceptable derivative thereof.

15. The method of claim 8 wherein the compound or a pharmaceutically acceptable derivative thereof is used for an organ transplant or for preserving blood products.

16. The method of claim 8 wherein the compound is used as a component of immunotherapy for the treatment of cancer.

17. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound according to any of claims 1-7 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.